

Be My Best Friend

by

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Kurt/Blaine || AU || K+

Eight year old Blaine was really hoping he would find a best friend when he went to football day camp. He just didn't expect it would be the shy little boy hiding in the equipment shed. Baby!Klaine.

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Blaine bounced up and down in the backseat of his mother's car. "Camp! Camp! Camp!" he chanted, pressing his nose to the window as he stared at the approaching fields.

Francey twisted around in her seat and bopped him in the face with one of her pompoms. "Yes, Blaine, we know it's camp," she said, rolling her eyes.

"Frances, be nice to your brother," Bev warned as she pulled the car into the crowded parking lot. Blaine had his seatbelt unbuckled before the car could come to a complete stop. "Blaine, darling, sit still."

"I'm just so excited!" he exclaimed. "I finally get to go to camp!"

"It's just day camp," Francey shrugged. "You're still not big enough for sleepaway camp."

"Neither are you," Blaine retorted.

Bev shook her head and slid gracefully out of the car. "Come on, children, take your things," she said.

Blaine scrambled out of the backseat, dragging his big navy and white duffel bag behind him. It was still early enough for the summer morning to be cloudy and cool, enough to merit the zipup hoodie he wore over his orange Harry Potter tee shirt. He wriggled his toes inside his third-best sneakers. "Mom, I think my shoes are too small," he announced.

"We just bought you new shoes," Bev said, frowning.

"Yeah, but these are the old ones and they're too small," he said. He brightened. "Mom, Mom, I'm growing again!"

"Me too!" Francey boasted. "See? Look how short my shorts got. It's because I'm taller than Blaine."

"No, it's because you're Hamiltons," Bev said, smoothing Blaine's curls and adjusting the perky bow in Francey's wild ponytail. "You'll both have massive growth spurts until middle school, then you'll never grow again, just like me."

"I'll be tall like Dad," Blaine declared. "I'm the tallest in my class!"

"Well, we'll wait and see," Bev said. "Now come on, I have to sign you in or you'll be late."

Blaine grabbed his mother's hand and trotted beside her eagerly. He had been looking forward to the YMCA's football camp ever since spring break, when he saw the flyer mailed to the house and begged his parents to let him go. They had been a little reluctant, but Francey had spotted the listing for their cheerleading camp and insisted that she wanted to go too.

The YMCA parking lot beside the wide expanse of green fields was packed with cars and crowds. Kids milled about everywhere, following their parents, and Blaine scanned the eagerly, looking for potential new best friends.

"Mom, I'm going to get a new best friend during camp," he announced.

Bev smiled and squeezed his hand. "I hope you do," she said.

"'Cause that's what I want really bad," Blaine told her as they got in line for registration. "I want a best friend. I'd really like it if I could have a best friend that lived next door, we could have tin cans on a string and talk in them like in the movies, but I just really want a best friend."

Bev tipped his chin up and kissed his forehead. "Well, maybe you'll find one this summer, darling," she said.

Francey rocked back and forth impatiently on her toes. "Mom, I'm going to try out for cheerleading in the fall," she said.

"Well, make sure you like it before you make those decisions," Bev said. "If you still like cheerleading after camp is over, then by all means, pet, try out for cheerleading. Just remember about when you wanted to take dance lessons."

"I know."

"And karate."

"I remember."

"And horseback riding."

"Yeah."

"And drums."

"Mom, I don't quit everything after two lessons!"

"Yeah, you do," Blaine snickered. Francey reached around behind their mother and flicked him in the ear.

"Ow! Mom! Francey's torturing me!"

"No, I'm not!"

Bev patiently separated her children for the umpteenth time and stepped up to the registration table. "Hi, my children are in two different camps," she told the volunteer, offering a brilliant smile. "Frances and Zachary Anderson?"

The volunteer shuffled through the paperwork. "Oh, yeah, here it is," she said. "How old are they?"

"Francey is going into seventh grade and Zachary's going into fourth," Bev said.

Blaine tugged on Bev's sleeve. "Mom, Mom, nobody calls me Zachary," he whispered loudly.

"He goes by a nickname?" the volunteer asked absently as she picked up their papers.

"His middle name," Bev explained.

The volunteer wrote out two nametag stickers and handed them over. "Here you go, kids," she said.

Blaine unzipped his hoodie and stuck the nametag on his shirt. "This is much better," he informed Bev.

"The cheerleading camp is across the field, and the elementary football camp is right over there," the volunteer said, pointing to a group of little boys sitting on the bleachers.

"Mom, I can walk by myself," Francey said, shouldering her bag.

Bev kissed her swiftly on the cheek before she could rebel. "Be good and listen to your coaches," she said.

"Keep an eye out for Babbie."

"I will, I will," Francey said, ducking away and running across the field to the other girls.

Blaine sidled a little closer to Bev. "Can...can you walk me over?" he whispered, the shyness he'd worked so hard to overcome starting to resurface.

"Of course," Bev said. She took him by the hand and walked with him across the field to the bleachers, the wet grass soaking through their shoes. "Are you excited about football camp?"

"Uh-huh," he said, looking down at the grass. "Mom...do you think the other kids will like me?"

"Of course they'll like you," she reassured him, squeezing his hand.

"Because they didn't really like me at school last year," he confessed. "I don't like school."

"I thought you did," she said. "Your grades were very good, and you have friends."

"Yeah, but David and Wes are best friends with each other and they said you can only have one best friend," he said. "Mom, I really want a best friend."

Bev stopped and knelt down in the damp grass. "You'll have a best friend," she promised softly. She stroked an unruly curl away from his forehead and kissed him lightly. "Now go with the other kids, okay?"

He nodded, kissing her on the cheek. Bev smiled. "Daddy will pick you and Francey up at three o'clock," she said. "And don't forget, your lunch is in your duffel. And do you have your handkerchief in your pocket?"

"Uh-huh, but I never need it," he said. "I don't know why you make me carry it around."

"Well, you never know when you might need it," Bev smiled. "Now be good, all right?" He nodded. She straightened, offering him one last affectionate squeeze of his hand before turning around to walk towards the car.

Blaine picked up his bag, squared his little shoulders, and marched over to the coaches. "Hi," he said. "My name is Blaine Anderson. I'm here for football camp."

The coach, a big man with a mustache, glanced down at his clipboard and checked something off. "Oh, yeah, okay," he said. "I'm Coach Nate." He jabbed his thumb in the direction of a lanky college student

setting up orange cones. "That's Coach Phil. Coach Shannon's getting the equipment out; you'll meet her in a bit. Stick your bag under the bleachers and sit with the other kids."

Blaine trotted off to obey, placing his duffel next to a Spiderman backpack and taking a seat next to a skinny boy with brown hair that stuck up in all directions. "Hi," he said. "I'm Blaine Anderson."

The skinny boy grinned at him, one corner of his mouth turning up more than the other. "I'm Finn," he said. He had big hands and feet that seemed too large for his thin limbs, like they had started growing first and the rest of his body was waiting to catch up. "Is this your first year at camp?"

"Uh-huh," Blaine said. "Is it yours too?"

"Yup," Finn said. "I was gonna go last year, but my mom's station wagon died and it needed a new alter...alt...alterator. So I didn't go."

Blaine dug the toe of his sneaker into a bare patch of dirt. "What position do you play?" he asked.

"Usually quarterback," Finn said proudly, sitting up straight. "What about you?"

Blaine shrugged. "I dunno," he said. "I really like football, but the other kids, they usually don't let me play, I don't know what I'm good at yet."

Finn nodded. "You might be a good kicker or something," he appraised. "Somethin' on offense." He pointed across the bleachers to two bigger kids who looked too old for third or fourth grade. "Dave and Adrian, they're usually defense. They go to my school, Roosevelt Elementary, and they're really good, they're gonna be on the team when we're in high school."

"Wow," Blaine said politely.

"I'm gonna be on the football team when I'm in high school," Finn added. "Like my dad. My dad was on the football team at his school, he was a quarterback too, he was really good, then he grew up and married my mom and went to be a soldier."

"Oh," Blaine said. He liked Finn. Maybe Finn would be a good best friend. "My dad is a college professor. He's got a lot of books."

"I don't like books," Finn declared. "Unless they have good pictures in them."

"Oh," Blaine said. Maybe Finn wasn't a good candidate for a best friend after all.

Suddenly Finn jumped up, nearly tripping over his oversized shoes. "Noah! Noah! Noah!" he called, waving. "That's my best friend, Noah, except a lot of people call him Puck, because his last name is Puckerman."

"Oh," Blaine said, sinking a little in disappointment. Finn already had a best friend, and David and Wes had insisted that a person could only have one. He watched as a short kid with a buzz cut dropped a tattered camo backpack under the bleachers and plunked down beside Finn, the two of them launching immediately into an in-depth conversation.

Blaine stifled a sigh and scanned the other kids piled over the bleachers, searching for a potential best friend. There was a little Asian kid who looked like he would be nice, but he also seemed sort of shy and he was busy playing a Gameboy. The two big kids Finn had pointed out, Adrian and Dave, looked like they were already best friends, and besides, they looked kind of mean. Blaine crossed his arms over his knees and rested his chin on his forearms.

A tall lady with broad shoulders and a pretty shade of lipstick walked over to them, a mesh bag full of small football helmets slung over her shoulder. "Hey, kids," she said cheerfully. "Welcome to football camp. I'm Coach Shannon, and I want you boys to be real respectful this summer, okay? You mouth off to me or Coach Nate or Coach Phil, and you won't be playing any football, you'll be running laps. Understand?"

The boys nodded, a couple of them (Blaine included) offering a "yes, ma'am." Coach Shannon dropped the bag of helmets on the ground. "Okay, boys, first things first," she said. "You gotta be protected. I don't want to have to take any of you to the emergency room because you cracked your head open or something."

"I've done that before," Noah Puckerman whispered loudly. "I got like twenty stitches."

"Yeah, well, I got thirty stitches last summer 'cause I got bit by a Doberman," Dave retorted, sticking out his leg to show a large scar that did not merit thirty stitches but was nonetheless impressive. Blaine itched at his single interesting scar, the small brown mark on his knee from falling off the back of the couch when he was five, and decided to keep his mouth shut.

"Listen up, boys," Coach Nate boomed, crossing his arms, and the campers fell silent.

"All right, I want each of you to come up here and pick out a helmet," Coach Shannon said.

The boys leaped up, running down to the bag and bursting into noisy chatter. Blaine waited politely for his turn, but before he could, the Asian boy raised his hand.

"Miss Coach Shannon, there's not enough," he announced.

"There's a couple more in the equipment shed," she said. "Who wants to go get them?" Blaine stretched his hand high in the air. "Okay, you, Frodo, go on and get the other bag."

Blaine jogged to the small rundown shed at the edge of the field, the summer sun already beginning to heat the back of his neck, and pulled the heavy, creaking door open. It was cool and quiet and musty, like the garage at his grandparents' house. He spotted the bag in the corner and picked it up.

Then someone sniffled.

Blaine paused. "Hello?" he said.

He didn't hear a sniffle, but there was a small shuffling sound, like something was trying to hide. *Francey would tell me it was a ghost, he thought. But ghosts don't sniffle.*

"Hello?" he called again. "I'm Blaine Anderson."

He heard another small sniff.

"I know you're not a ghost, because ghosts say things like 'boo', they don't sniffle," he said. "Are you a mouse? Wait, mice don't sniffle either."

He followed the sound to the corner of the shed, behind an old riding mower covered in dried mud and ancient grass clippings. A very small boy hid behind the mower, huddled in the corner. "Oh, hello," Blaine said politely. "What are you doing here?"

"Hiding," the little boy said in a quiet, high voice.

"From what?" Blaine inquired.

"Things."

"What kind of things?"

"Football things."

"Oh," Blaine said, brightening. "Are you in football camp too?"

The smaller boy's mouth tightened. "Uh-huh," he said.

Blaine frowned. "Don't you want to be in football camp?" he asked. "I do."

The boy's mouth pressed into a thin white line, and his chin trembled. He shook his head. "I don't want to be here," he said. "I wanna go h-home."

Blaine crouched down beside him. "You can't go home until three o'clock when camp is over," he said.

"Then I'm gonna hide here until three," the little boy said, raising his chin stubbornly even though he looked like he was on the verge of crying.

"I don't think you can do that," Blaine said warily. "You'll get hungry and you'll have to pee. And I think you have to come play football."

"But I don't *like* football," the little boy said. "My daddy made me come."

"But if you didn't want to come, couldn't your mom tell your dad not to make you?" Blaine asked, perplexed.

The little boy really did start crying then, just a little bit. Big tears gathered on his long lashes. "I haven't got a mom anymore," he said.

Blaine blinked. "Oh," he said. He had never met anyone who didn't have a mother. Briefly he thought of what it would be like without his mother, and his stomach started to hurt. "No wonder you're so sad."

The little boy wiped uselessly at his wet eyes with his damp fists. "Oh, please don't cry," Blaine said. He rummaged in the cargo pocket of his dark khaki shorts for his handkerchief. "Here, you use this."

The little boy took the soft white square with a bold red 'B' embroidered in the corner. "Thank you," he said, dabbing at his eyes carefully.

Blaine patted his shoulder. "My name is Blaine," he offered helpfully. "What's your name?"

"Kurt," he said. He folded the handkerchief carefully and held it out to Blaine. "Thank you."

"No, it's okay, you keep it," he said. He glanced back through the open door of the shed where the other boys were loitering around the field as the coaches divided them up. "Do you want to come play?"

"I'm not very good at football," Kurt said.

"It's okay, I'm not either," Blaine said cheerfully. "I never get to play with anybody, I just like watching it on TV with my dad and throwing a football at my sister."

Kurt frowned. "Don't you mean *with* your sister?" he asked.

"No, at," Blaine said. He held out his hand. "If you get to be in my group, will you come play?"

Kurt studied Blaine's slightly grubby hand warily.

"You'll get to eat lunch, instead of hiding in a shed until three o'clock," Blaine reminded him.

Kurt carefully took Blaine's hand. His fingers felt very soft and very cool. "Can I hide again if I don't like it?" he asked.

Blaine pulled Kurt to his feet. "As long as you at least try," he said. "If you try and you still don't like it, then you can hide in the shed and I'll sneak you some lunch."

"Okay," Kurt said, still clinging to Blaine's hand as he led him out of the cramped equipment shed.

Blaine shouldered the bag of extra helmets as he walked with Kurt across the field. Now that they were out of the dark, musty shed, he could see the smaller boy clearly. Unlike the other boys who wore khaki

cargos or brightly colored basketball shorts with tee shirts and old athletic shoes, Kurt wore short cuffed navy shorts and a yellow striped V-neck tee shirt with navy Keds sneakers. His soft brown hair was ruffled and his pale cheek was smeared with a little dust from the shed. "How old are you?" Blaine asked. "I'm eight and a half."

"I was eight in April," Kurt said, a little shyly.

"Really? You look littler than that, like six maybe," Blaine said.

Kurt scowled, his eyebrows drawing down above his bright blue-green eyes. "My daddy says I am small for my age," he said primly. "But he says when I'm older I'll have a growth spurt like everybody else. Maybe I'll be taller than you."

"Nah-uh," Blaine said, shaking his dark curls. "I'm gonna be tall like my dad. I decided."

"Well, *I* decided I'm gonna be taller than you," Kurt announced, letting go of Blaine's hand. Blaine frowned, but he dropped the mesh bag with the helmets down on the ground. He picked one up before the other boys could descend on it and handed it to Kurt.

Kurt stared at it, dismayed. "What do I do with this?" he said.

Blaine picked one up for himself. "It's a helmet, put it on your head," he said, plopping it on over his curls.

Kurt held it out at arm's length. "It smells funny," he objected. "Like bad funny."

Blaine shrugged. "Sports stuff always smells like...sports stuff," he said.

Kurt gingerly slid the helmet on over his hair. It looked comically too large atop his tiny body. "Ew, now it smells even more yucky," he complained.

"But now you won't get your head cracked open," Coach Shannon said, rapping lightly on the top of Kurt's helmet. "All right, boys, go to your groups for drills."

Blaine grabbed Kurt by the arm and dragged him into his group. Kurt latched onto his sleeve and hid a little behind him as Coach Phil started explaining the drill they were going to do.

They ran drills for a while, the sun creeping up higher and higher in the sky until they were all complaining for a water break. It was tiring, but it was fun. Blaine had never gotten a chance to play football like this, other than some half-hearted P.E. classes, and he was excited to realize that he was actually sort of good- not as Dave or even Finn, but still good.

Kurt, though...Kurt wasn't good. He was fairly coordinated, and he was good at dodging the bigger kids, but he jumped away from the ball every time it came towards him and he sort of ran like a duck. Blaine probably would have laughed if Kurt hadn't stayed so close beside him.

"You did good, boys, for a bunch of midgets," Coach Nate boomed. "Take a water break. We'll start the next round of drills in twenty minutes."

The herd of boys stampeded to the water coolers set up on the picnic tables. Blaine tugged off his helmet, gasping at the sudden burst of fresh air. "That was awesome!" he said, shaking his sweat-damp curls. "I love football."

Kurt carefully pried his helmet away; his little face was red and sweaty. "It's all right, I guess," he sighed, setting the helmet on the ground.

Blaine pushed past the other kids and grabbed a cup of cold water. Puck had poured water over his head and was shaking the droplets off onto Finn like a dog; Blaine just laughed and chugged his water, splashing a little on his face.

He shuffled his way through the small crowd back to Kurt. Kurt stood a little ways off from the other boys, arms crossed over his little chest and his eyebrows arched as he stared down his nose. "Are you okay?" Blaine asked. "Are you going to get some water?"

Kurt raised and lowered his shoulder. "I don't want them bumping me around," he said loftily. "I'll wait."

Blaine frowned. "But it's really hot out. You should have water," he said. "My mom says that if you go outside when it's hot and you don't drink water, you'll get sick. Didn't your mom-"

He cut off in midsentence. "Um, wait here," he said. He dodged back past the other boys- Finn was trying to dump one of the coolers on Puck's head while Mike shrieked that they were going to get in trouble- and refilled his cup to the brim.

Carefully he carried it back to Kurt, a little bit of water spilling onto his hand. "Here," he said, holding it out. "Sorry, I couldn't get another cup, but at least you won't be thirsty, right?"

Kurt smiled, a dimple popping faintly in one round cheek. "Thank you," he said, taking the paper cup and taking a cautious sip.

They fell silent as Kurt sipped the water, his gaze straying across the field. Blaine tried to figure out what he was looking at and finally realized he was staring longingly at the cheerleaders on the opposite end. They were learning some sort of new routine that involved a lot of arm-waving and a couple of high kicks, and Kurt let out a sigh.

Unexpectedly Blaine felt a weird pang in the pit of his stomach as Kurt stared at the girls. It made sense, sort of. Some of the other boys in his class were already picking out girls that they liked. It just...he didn't like seeing Kurt stare at the pretty girls, even if he didn't exactly know why.

"So...do you like one of the cheerleaders?" Blaine asked casually. "It better not be the girl with the long black hair. 'Cause that's my sister. And she's a lot meaner than she looks. And besides, if you were mean to her, I'd have to like...kick you or something. And I don't want to do that."

"I wanted to go to cheerleading camp," Kurt said glumly.

Blaine scooted closer. "Really?" he said.

Kurt nodded. "See, usually in the summer, I stay at home with...with my mom, 'cause she teaches...taught art at my school, but my mom..." He gulped hard. "My dad has a garage, and he can't take care of me all day, so he put me in day camp, but when I picked out what camp I wanted to go to, he thought I meant the football camp, but I didn't."

Blaine tilted his head to the side. Kurt sighed, blowing a puff of air out of the corner of his mouth and fluffing his bangs off his forehead. "Come on," Blaine said, holding out his hand.

"Why?" Kurt inquired.

Blaine opened and closed his fingers. "Come on," he insisted. Kurt took his hand, and Blaine dragged him across the field towards the girls. He marched towards the middle schoolers, dragging Kurt behind him. "Francey!" he called. "Francey! Hi, Francey."

Francey dropped her arms from a high V and glared at him. "What, Babbie?" she asked irritably.

"This is my friend Kurt," Blaine announced. "He wants to be in cheerleading camp."

"Then why didn't his mom and dad put him in cheer camp?" Francey asked.

Blaine tugged on her wrist. "His mom's dead," he whispered.

Francey shifted her gaze towards Kurt, who stared down at the grass and rubbed the top of one navy Ked sneaker against the back of his ankle. "Hey, c'mere," she said. Kurt looked up, blinking his wide eyes. "Come on, duckling. Let me show you how this goes."

Kurt blinked again. Francey huffed and held out her hand. "Come on," she said impatiently. "How old are you, like six?"

"I'm *eight*," Kurt said, scowling.

Francey stuck the fingers of her other hand into her mouth and let out a piercing whistle. "Hey!" she called. "Blonde and Blonder! Get over here!"

Two little girls dropped their pompoms and ran over to Francey. They were both pretty, with blonde hair tied up in ponytails, but one was thin and almost as tall as Blaine, and the other was petite and rosy-cheeked. "What?" the smaller one asked, tossing her ponytail back over her shoulder.

Francey tugged Kurt in front of them and wrapped her arms around his neck. "This is my little brother's friend Kurt," she informed. "We're going to teach him how to be a cheerleader."

The taller girl smiled, a little vacant but sweet, and she petted the top of his head. "He's so cute," she said. "I could put him in my pocket."

"I'm *eight*," Kurt repeated, narrowing his eyes.

"Brittany, he's not a baby," the other girl said. She picked up a pompom and handed it to Kurt. "I'm Quinn. Come on, I'll show you how to do your high Vs right."

Kurt brightened and followed Quinn, hugging the pompom to his chest. Francey grinned and ruffled Blaine's curls. "I think he's going to be fine," she said. "Go on and throw your football around."

Blaine glanced back at Kurt, who was happily waving around pompoms with Quinn and Brittany. "Okay," he said. "Thanks, Francey."

She tugged playfully on his earlobe. "Run along, Babbie, run along," she said.

Blaine squirmed out of her grasp and ran back to the football group. The coaches were already rounding them up and dividing them into new groups for the next round of drills. He found himself paired up with Finn and Puck's group, but he kept looking across the field at Kurt, bouncing around with the cheerleaders and waving a set of pompoms happily. Blaine resisted the urge to sigh. It was nice to see Kurt so happy, but he sort of...missed him.

Coach Nate blew his whistle after another round or two of drills. "Okay, munchkins, grab your lunches and head inside," he called.

Blaine scrambled over to the bleachers and grabbed his brown paper sack from his duffle bag. He ducked in and out of the other kids until he felt a little hand grab onto his elbow. "Hi!" Kurt chirped, pink-cheeked and starry-eyed.

"Hi," Blaine said. "Do you like the cheerleading camp?"

"Uh-huh!" Kurt said. He was beaming from ear to ear, his lunchbox swinging in his hand. "Quinn says I'm gonna be a really good cheerleader, and Brittany says my hair smells good. And Francey is really nice to me."

"Really?" Blaine said, frowning. "'Cause she's usually not very nice to me."

Kurt laughed, bright and happy, and held the door open for Blaine as the swarm of campers trooped into the cool gymnasium to eat their lunches. The two of them took a corner and sat down on a pile of gymnastics mats. Blaine eagerly ripped open his brown paper sack, tearing across his name written in his mother's elegant cursive, and pulled out a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a bag of carrot and celery sticks, a bag of Pringles chips, two Capri Suns, and several large homemade cookies.

"My mom makes *really* good lunches," Blaine boasted. "What do you have?"

Kurt flipped the lid on his Finding Nemo lunchbox. "A Lunchable," he said nonchalantly. He pulled out his pizza Lunchable, a prepackaged bag of apple slices with caramel dip, and a package of Dunkaroos, then opened up his thermos. "And I think my dad put juice in here." He took an experimental little sip. "Mm-hm, it's white grape juice. Which I like."

"I think your dad packs really good lunches," Blaine said.

Kurt sighed. "He can't make stuff though," he said. "I haven't had a sandwich since...I don't remember." He gazed longingly at the lunch that Blaine's mother had made for him. "Do you want to share? I'll share my lunch with you if you share your lunch with me."

"I don't know," Blaine said warily. "My mom makes my sandwiches with crunchy peanut butter and strawberry jam, and my sister says that's gross, so you might not like it."

Kurt's eyes widened and his mouth rounded into a surprised little 'o'. "That is my favorite kind of sandwich," he said solemnly.

Blaine sat up. "Then we should totally share our lunches!" he said.

They spread the contents of their lunches between them, nibbling off of each other's snacks while they talked. Blaine ate most of Kurt's Dunkaroos, and Kurt helped himself to all of Blaine's celery. There were two big chocolate chip cookies so they took one each, Blaine gobbling his in big bites and Kurt nibbling around the edge.

Lunchtime was almost over when Coach Phil walked over to them. "Hey, sport," he said, crouching down to address Kurt. "Listen, you gotta stay with the rest of the group, okay? You can't go play with the girls."

Kurt put his cookie down. "I wasn't playing," he objected. "I was cheering."

The lanky college student scratched the back of his neck. "You can't cheer, buddy, you're in the football camp and you gotta stay with us," he said, half-apologizing. "We're gonna play a real game after lunch and you guys'll get your jerseys, so that'll be fun, right?"

He patted Kurt on the head awkwardly and walked away quickly without waiting for an answer. Kurt just stared blankly. "I got in trouble," he said in a small voice.

Blaine swallowed his mouthful of cookie. "I don't think you're in trouble," he said, patting Kurt's knee. "If you were in trouble, he would've yelled at you, and he didn't yell, so you're okay."

"I didn't do stuff right," Kurt said forlornly. "But grownups *never* get mad at me. And now I have to play football."

He looked like he was on the verge of tears again. Blaine scooted closer and gingerly put his arm around Kurt's shoulders. "It's gonna be okay," he said, patting Kurt's upper arm. "It'll be fun to play a real football game."

"I'm not gonna be any good," Kurt said, sniffing a little.

"Well, it'll be three o'clock soon, and then you'll get to go home," Blaine consoled. Kurt sniffed again and took another little nibble of his cookie.

After a while the coaches and counselors came through, rounding up the kids again, and Blaine tugged Kurt towards the football camp and the open field before Kurt could hide behind the gymnastics equipment.

Coach Shannon was waiting for them by the bleachers with a stack of bright blue tee shirts in her hands. "All right, boys, I've got your jerseys," she said. "I'm going to call your name, you come up and get your shirt. Blaine Anderson."

Blaine grabbed his eagerly and quickly changed out of his orange shirt. "This is *awesome*," he said happily.

Kurt frowned. "Mine is too big," he complained.

"Put it on over your other shirt," Blaine suggested. Kurt obeyed, but the jersey continued to slide around on his shoulders. "Wow, it is big. You look like you're wearing your daddy's clothes." Kurt sighed heavily.

Coach Nate blew his whistle. "We're gonna divide you up into two teams," he declared. "I'm going to count you off. You're gonna get your helmet and go your side of the field- even numbers there, odd numbers there."

"Are we going to be on the same team?" Kurt whispered. Blaine shrugged as Coach Nate counted them off.

It turns out that they were not on the same team. Blaine headed across the field with Puck and Mike; Kurt dragged himself to the other side with Finn and that big Dave kid. He didn't seem happy at all.

They started their first game, and at first Blaine was having a blast. He was faster than Puck, and he could throw a little stronger than Mike, and his team was winning. Then he realized how miserable Kurt looked. He didn't pay much attention to the game, usually wandering to the side to pick especially long blade of grass or kick the toe of his sneaker against fluffy white dandelion heads. When the ball came towards him, he usually didn't see it until it fell at his feet, or he put his hands over his face.

The big Dave kid looked like he was getting madder and madder at Kurt. Every time Kurt missed the ball or jumped away from a tackle he would make a loud growly huffing noise. Sometimes he said something mean about Kurt to his friend Adrian, who would snort. Kurt didn't seem to pay attention to them, though, which made Blaine feel a little better.

They were partway through their second game when things got really bad. Kurt was standing close to the goal line; it took a little bit before Blaine realized that Kurt was practicing the cheerleading moves he'd learned early, waving his arms in perfect straight lines. But then the ball zipped towards Kurt, spinning in a lazy spiral, and if Kurt had just reached out his arms a little bit he would have caught it perfectly. A nice, gentle, easy catch.

Unfortunately, Kurt didn't notice, and the ball tumbled to the ground.

Dave ripped off his helmet and threw it on the ground. "You're so stupid!" he screeched.

Kurt glanced up, startled, and tipped his helmet back. "I'm not stupid," he objected.

"You're so dumb!" Dave said, storming over to Kurt. "You could have caught that! You're retarded!" He planted his hands on Kurt's narrow shoulders and shoved him back.

"You said a bad word!" Kurt exclaimed shrilly. "And you pushed me!"

"What are you gonna do about, princess?" Dave jeered.

Kurt glared and lunged at Dave, slamming his fists at whatever part of the bigger boy he could reach. "You shut up!" he shrieked.

"Make me!" Dave shouted. Kurt grabbed at Dave's sleeve, nearly ripping it off, and sank his sharp little teeth into the thick flesh of his upper arm. The bigger boy howled. "He's biting me! He's biting me!"

"Well, you called me names and you pushed me!" Kurt said, stumbling back. "You're so mean!"

"Whadaya gonna do, tattletale to your mommy?" Dave taunted.

Kurt went very white for a second, then his cheeks reddened as he threw himself onto Dave, pulling at his short hair and flailing on his broad back. "You shut up!" he screamed. "Shut up, shut up, shut up!"

Blaine stared at the two boys fighting, frozen in place. Finn tore off his helmet and tried to pull Dave off of Kurt. "Quit it, Karofsky, leave him alone!" he said, grabbing uselessly at Dave's shirt.

Finn wasn't fast enough. Dave pushed Kurt off of him and onto the ground, making him tumble backwards in the soft hot grass, and then kicked him hard in the stomach.

Everything was silent for a moment. Then Kurt burst into tears.

Coach Nate blew his whistle. "Cut it out, boys, get back to the game," he said. Kurt continued to cry, crumpled up in the grass. Finn bit his lip and looked around helplessly for a grown up that was going to help.

Coach Shannon jogged in from the other side of the field. "Nate, what the hell are you doing?" she demanded.

"Well, they just-"

"I was on the opposite side and *I* could see that those two were going at it," she snapped. She grabbed Dave by the back of his collar and dragged him back. "You are benched, mister. Park it on the bleachers. You aren't playing anymore today, and if you pull a stunt like this in my camp again, you won't be back." Dave backed away and sat down.

Coach Shannon knelt down beside Kurt as Blaine and the other kids stared. "Hey, buddy," she said, her voice considerably more gentle than it was a second ago. "He got in a pretty nasty kick, didn't he?"

Kurt curled up in a little ball. "My tummy hurts," he sobbed.

"Okay, okay, let's take a look," Coach Shannon said. She tugged up the hem of Kurt's jersey, then his tee shirt, exposing a big red mark where Dave's shoe had connected with Kurt's stomach. "Looks like you're going to get a pretty big bruise, hon, but no real damage done." She patted his shoulder. "Let's get you over to the shade, okay? You can lie down and I'll get you an ice pack."

"Miss Coach Shannon, they've got two people off their team and now we're uneven," Mike piped up. "We've got too many."

Blaine raised his hand. "I can go," he offered, taking off his helmet. "I'll sit with Kurt."

Coach Shannon picked Kurt up and set him on his feet. "Go walk him over to the shade," she ordered. "I'll get him an ice pack."

Kurt still cried silently as Blaine slipped his hand in his. Finn patted Kurt's shoulder awkwardly as they walked away and Coach Nate whistled to start the game again. "I think you'll be okay," Blaine offered, helpless in the face of both injury and tears. "You don't have to go to the hospital."

Kurt's chin trembled as big tears rolled down his cheeks, staying silent while Blaine led him over to one of the big shade trees at the side of the field. Coach Shannon strode over to them with a big flat ice pack in her hand. "All right, buddy, lie down," she said, patting Kurt on the head. Kurt obeyed and she draped the ice pack over his stomach. "That's gonna help. You just lie here until you feel better, okay? And if you start feeling like you're gonna throw up or something, you tell Blaine so he can get me."

"Y-yes, ma'am," Kurt whispered, his shoulders hitching slightly. Coach Shannon squeezed his shoulder before turning back to the field.

Blaine sat down in the cool grass beside Kurt, resting his chin in his hands. Kurt closed his eyes and stretched his arms above his head, his little chest still catching in short shuddering breaths. "Are you sick?" Blaine asked warily. He didn't like it when people threw up; his mom called him a "sympathetic puker."

Kurt shook his head. "I just want my daddy," he said in a small voice. "Can you make them call my daddy?"

Blaine scratched the back of his neck and surveyed the fields. "I think it's almost three o'clock," he said. "Your dad will be here soon."

They fell silent. Blaine plucked a long thick strand of grass, tearing it slowly along the long ridges. Kurt shielded his eyes with his forearm, his tears eventually subsiding as his breathing deepened and evened.

Blaine leaned over him. "Kurt?" he ventured.

"Hm?" Kurt murmured sleepily, his breath catching a little bit in the last fragment of a sob.

"Are you better?"

Kurt shrugged, poking at the ice pack draped over his stomach. "I'm just sleepy now, I think," he said.

"Oh, you can't go to sleep," Blaine warned. "My mom wouldn't let me sleep the last time I fell off Francey's skateboard, she said I...oh, wait, maybe you just can't sleep when you hit your head."

"I just want to go home and take a nap," Kurt sighed. "My mommy used to take naps with me. She'd lie down on the couch and let me snuggle next to her and then we'd fall asleep until my dad came home."

"Do you miss your mommy?" Blaine asked.

Kurt nodded. "Sometimes I forget," he confessed quietly. "Sometimes I wake up in the morning and I think she forgot to come get me up, so I just lie there and lie there until I remember that she isn't coming for me."

"But you still have your daddy," Blaine said, trying to stifle the lump rising in his throat.

"Uh-huh," Kurt said. "I love my dad. He says I'm his favorite person in the whole wide world. And he fixes cars, you know, and sometimes he lets me help, and it's fun."

"Is fixing cars your favorite thing to do?" Blaine inquired.

Kurt moved his arm away from his eyes. "No," he said softly. "But you'll think it's silly."

"No, I won't," Blaine said, scooting a little closer. "I promise."

Kurt blinked up at him, the light filtering through the leaves above them casting odd shadows over his face. "I like singing," he confessed.

"Why would I think that's silly?" Blaine said, shrugging. "I like singing too."

Kurt brightened. "Really?" he said.

"I sing a lot," Blaine smiled. He looked down at his shoes and tugged at the grass. "Hey, Kurt?"

"Uh-huh?"

Blaine ripped out a blade of grass and twined it around his finger. "Do you have a best friend?" he ventured.

Kurt shook his head. "I've never had a best friend before," he said.

"Me neither!" Blaine said.

Kurt sat up carefully, pressing the ice pack to his bruised stomach. "Do you think...that we could be best friends?" he asked shyly.

"I think that would be awesome," Blaine said.

They smiled at each other for a moment, then Kurt frowned. "What do best friends do?" he asked. "Are we supposed to give each other something? My mom told me that when my dad asked her to marry him, he gave her a ring."

"I don't know if it works the same," Blaine said, twirling a curl around his finger absently while he thought. "I gave you my handkerchief. So I guess you're supposed to give me something so we know we're best friends."

Kurt bit his lip. "I don't know what to give you," he said, perplexed.

"It's okay," Blaine shrugged. "You can just give me something when you think of it."

Kurt sat back, worrying at his lip, and then he brightened. "I have an idea," he said, scooting on his knees closer to Blaine.

"What are you-"

Kurt leaned in and kissed Blaine swiftly on the cheek, his lips soft and light and velvety against his skin. "I gave you a kiss," he said happily.

Blaine sat back on his heels, his fingers reaching up slowly to touch the softly stinging spot where Kurt had kissed him. "Wh-why'd you kiss me?" he whispered.

Kurt faltered, pressing his fingers to his lips as he sat back down. "Did I do a bad thing?" he said. "Was...was that wrong?"

"No," Blaine said quickly. "No, not at all. I was just...I was surprised. A good surprise!"

Kurt twisted his fingertips together, looking up at Blaine through his thick fringe of lashes. "My mommy said that kisses were the best way to show people that you liked them," he said. "She used to kiss me all the time. And I just thought...that since you're my best friend...it would be...I don't know. It would be nice."

Blaine tilted his head to the side. "Do you miss your mom kissing you?" he asked.

Kurt nodded.

Blaine leaned closer, balancing carefully with one hand on Kurt's knee, and kissed Kurt on the cheek. "There," he said, satisfied. "Now you got a kiss too."

Kurt frowned and thwapped Blaine upside the head, ruffling his curls. "Now we're not even and I have to come up with something else to give you!" he complained. "That's very frustrating."

"Ow," Blaine said. "Didn't you like getting a kiss?"

Kurt paused. "Well, it was nice," he admitted.

"I'm glad we're best friends," Blaine said. He grinned at Kurt. Kurt smiled back at him, the dimple popping in his cheek again.

Coach Shannon walked over to them. "Hey, buddy, how're you doing?" she asked, crouching down beside Kurt.

"Better, thank you," he said, shifting the melting ice pack a little.

"Well, listen, your team needs a kicker right now," Coach Shannon said. "You wanna come give it a try?"

Kurt hesitated, then nodded. Blaine scrambled to his feet and helped him up. "So...all I have to do is kick, right?" Kurt said. "I don't have to run around and stuff?"

"No running, just kicking," Coach Shannon promised.

Blaine grabbed onto Kurt's hand as they walked across the field. "I'm really good at kicking!" Kurt exclaimed, bouncing up and down as they walked. "Quinn and Brittany taught me how to kick really really high, and they said I was good."

"Then you're gonna be a good football kicker," Blaine grinned.

"All right, Blaine, back on your side," Coach Shannon said as they approached the game. "Kurt, buddy, come with me. I'll show you what to do."

Blaine ran over to the other kids. "Hey, is Kurt okay?" Finn asked. "I thought Dave was gonna kill him."

"Yeah, but Kurt's kinda tougher than he looks," Puck said, sounding slightly impressed.

"My mom says that good boys shouldn't fight," Mike said, shaking his head. He paused. "Or was that just good *Asian* boys..."

"He's okay," Blaine told them. "He has a really big bruise on his tummy, but he'll be okay. And guys, he's my best friend now."

"That's awesome," Finn said. "Puck and I are best friends, and it's pretty awesome, we've been best friends ever since preschool when Puck-"

"Don't tell him that story!" Puck screeched, jumping on Finn's back and making him yelp.

"Boys, shut up and pay attention, he's about to kick the ball," Coach Nate called, sounding bored.

Blaine watched as Coach Shannon showed Kurt how to kick properly. Kurt looked small beside her, his oversized football jersey hanging off his shoulders. Coach Shannon set up the ball and patted him on the back, then walked to the side. Kurt took a deep breath.

"You'll be good, you'll be good, you'll be good," Blaine chanted under his breath, eyes glued to his tiny best friend.

Kurt took a couple of steps back, his little hips swinging almost like he was dancing, then ran forward, swinging his leg up and kicking the ball hard. It swooped through the air, arching over their heads and straight through the goal.

"Wow," Finn said.

"Holy crap, he's awesome!" Puck said.

Mike's eyes widened. "Noah said a bad word! Noah said a bad word!" he yelped. "He said the 'c' word!"

"Tattletale," Puck mumbled.

Blaine skidded across the field and crashed into Kurt, hugging him tightly. "You're really good!" he said.

"I am!" Kurt said, beaming. "I am!" He clapped his hands and jumped up and down. "My daddy's going to be real proud of me!"

"Good job, buddy," Coach Shannon praised. "Now go sit on the sidelines and wait for the next time we need you, okay?"

The rest of the day passed quickly. Blaine's team won that game, and they had enough time for a short game after that where Kurt's team won. By the time three o'clock rolled around, all of the boys were hot, sweaty, and tired, but beaming. The coaches made them all gather up their bags and herded them to the sidewalk in front of the building to wait for their parents.

"I'm so sleepy," Kurt sighed, plopping down in the shade with his Ariel backpack beside him. "I wanna take a nap."

"I'm not tired!" Blaine said. "I wanna do that again! I can't wait for it to be tomorrow."

Kurt bit his lip. "Oh, yeah," he said. "Football camp is all month..."

Blaine frowned. "What's wrong?" he asked. "You're a really good kicker."

"But I liked cheerleading camp," Kurt said. "I really liked it, and Quinn and Brittany were nice to me."

"They're not your best friends now, right?" Blaine asked.

"No, you're my best friend," Kurt smiled, elbowing him. "I just wish I could be at cheerleading camp instead. Because then I would have fun cheering, and you could have fun playing football, and then we could eat lunch together."

"Will you have Dunkaroos tomorrow?" Blaine asked.

Kurt shrugged. "Maybe," he said. He sighed heavily. "My dad really wanted me to be in the football camp, so I guess I'll just play football all summer."

Blaine frowned, the afternoon breeze ruffling his curls as they studied the parking lot. Suddenly Kurt scrambled to his feet and grabbed his backpack. "My daddy's here!" he shrieked. "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

A big pickup truck pulled up to the curb and a big man in a baseball cap and a plaid shirt got out. He held out his arms as Kurt raced to him and picked him up easily. "Hey, scooter," he said, hugging him tightly as Kurt flung his arms around his neck. "Geez, kiddo, I missed you today."

"I missed you too, Daddy," Kurt said.

"So, did you like football camp?" Kurt's dad asked.

Kurt bit his lip. "Um," he said. "Yes. I did."

Blaine scrambled off the grass and marched over to them. "Excuse me, Mister Kurt's dad?" he said. He stuck out his hand. "My name is Blaine Anderson."

Kurt's dad shifted Kurt to his hip and shook Blaine's hand gravely. "You can call me Burt, son," he said. "Nice to meet you."

"Mr. Burt, Kurt didn't want to tell you, but I'm his best friend and I know things, so...Kurt doesn't like football camp, he wants to be in cheerleading camp," Blaine informed him.

Burt frowned. "Kurt, is that true?" he asked.

Kurt buried his face in his dad's shoulder and mumbled something. Blaine couldn't understand it, but apparently Burt did. He smiled fondly and patted Kurt's back. "Tell you what, kiddo," he said. "You finish out the week with football, and if you still want to do cheerleading stuff, then we'll see about getting you transferred to that camp. Deal?"

"Deal!" Kurt said, perking up immediately. "Thank you, Dad."

"I just want you to do one full week, because you're a Hummel and Hummels aren't quitters," Burt said. "But we'll look into this...cheerleading thing." He patted Kurt's back. "Now let's get you home, all right?"

"Okay," Kurt said. He leaned over Burt's shoulder and waved. "Bye, Blaine! I'll see you tomorrow!"

"Bye!" Blaine said, waving back cheerfully. "Bring Dunkaroos!"

He settled back into the grass as Kurt climbed into the passenger seat of the truck. Kurt waved back at him through the window as Burt drove out of the parking lot, his small hand flailing; Blaine waved back until the truck disappeared down the street. He flopped back into the grass, staring up at the blue sky and softly-shifting clouds until his eyes closed and he started to drift off to sleep.

"Blaine! Blaine! Wake up!" Something cold and wet splashed in his face and he sat up sputtering. "Babbie, get up, Dad's here!"

"Aw, *Frances*," he yelped, swiping frantically at his hair. "You threw your Capri Sun on me! Now I'm gonna smell like fruit punch!"

Francey shrugged. "Well, right now you smell like sweaty little boy, so I'd say the fruit punch is an improvement," she said. She reached out to help him up. "Come on, Babbie, let's go. I'm tired."

Blaine glared at her as he picked up his bag. Their father's car pulled up to the curb and Hal got out of the car, grinning affably as he scanned the crowd for his two children.

"Dad!" Blaine shouted.

He ran towards him as Hal opened his arms and caught him in a hug. "What ho, good sir," he laughed. "How was camp today?"

"It was really good," Blaine said. "Dad, did you know it's even more fun to play football then just watch it?"

"I would imagine so," Hal said. He hugged his daughter around her shoulders and kissed her on the forehead. "How was cheerleading, pet?"

"It was awesome," Francey said. "Oh, and Blaine has to sit in the back. He got fruit punch in his hair and now he's all sticky and smells like fruit."

"It's my turn to sit up front with Dad!" Blaine protested. "And besides, you're the one who squirted Capri Sun on my head!"

"Now, now, now," Hal said, separating them. "Frances in the front, Blaine in the back. But when we get home, Blaine gets the shower first."

Blaine snickered. "But Dad!" Francey protested. "I'm all sweaty and gross, and isn't it always ladies first?"

"Ladies don't pour drink pouches on their little brother's head," Hal pointed out. Francey huffed and climbed into the front seat of the car with an epically annoyed eye roll. "All right, Blaine, into the car."

Blaine tugged on the hem of his father's shirt. "Hey, Daddy?" he said.

Hal paused, smiling at his son. "What is it?" he asked.

"I got a best friend today," Blaine said.

Hal crouched down, cupping Blaine's face in his hands. "So today was an extremely good day, wasn't it?" he said.

"Uh-huh," Blaine said, nodding eagerly. "I've wanted a best friend for a very long time."

"I know," Hal said. "Treasure him well. A good friend is hard to find." He rubbed his thumb against Blaine's sticky cheek. "Now, let's get you home before your hair solidifies and starts a life of its own."

Blaine laughed and clambered into the backseat of the car. "We're listening to Fall Out Boy on the way home," Francey said in a decisive, bored tone that Bev had taken to calling her "teenager voice."

"Only if you can explain to me what the lyrics mean," Hal said. "I find their imagery interesting, but arcane."

Francey huffed. "Dad! You're not supposed to like it!" she said. "I'm trying to be rebellious!"

Blaine tuned out their conversation and leaned his forehead against the window, already thinking of how much fun camp was going to be tomorrow with his new best friend by his side.